

LESSON 9: MENTORING



*bias (-es)
colloquialisms
cultural diversity
dysfunctions
ethnicity
humanistic
mentee
multicultural (ism)
socioeconomic
stereotypes*

PURPOSE

This lesson presents a mentoring program designed to help you explore new interests in helping others, further develop your personal skills, and stay excited about school. Mentoring activities will center around building trust and developing positive self-esteem through sharing and working together with your subordinates, peers, or other teenagers and children in one-to-one relationships. The mentoring role is a major commitment on your part. In addition to comprehending the concept of self-identity, you must also understand the skills necessary in a mentoring relationship and work to acquire those skills. Finally, you must have an awareness of culturally diverse issues which can affect you, your mentoring program, and your community.

As an old man walked the beach at dawn, he noticed a young man ahead picking

up starfish and flinging them into the sea. Finally catching up to the youth, he asked the young man why he was doing this. The answer was that the stranded starfish would die if left until the morning sun.

“But the beach goes on for miles and there are millions of starfish,” countered the old man. “How can your effort make a difference?”

The young man looked at the starfish in his hand and then threw it to safety in the waves. “It makes a difference to that one,” he said.

INTRODUCTION

Mentoring is a “sustained one-to-one relationship which promotes human development by regular, joint participation in structured activities.” A dynamic mentoring program in your cadet battalion or school is one that encourages the development of caring partnerships. Every mentoring program requires the presence of positive role models to support high school mentors as they build positive interpersonal relations both in and out of school-based experiences. In this lesson, we will briefly look at how mentoring identifies with Army JROTC and your position as a cadet leader and mentor. Then, we will examine in detail how mentoring pertains to your development as a high school student entrusted with the responsibility to help others.

MENTORING IN RELATIONSHIP TO ARMY JROTC LEADERSHIP

The concept of mentoring includes the roles of the teacher, role model, coach, and counselor. However, mentors are more than teachers and coaches; they are trusted guides and counselors — although as a mentor, you

are not a trained counselor. Leaders as mentors are responsible for molding and developing individuals into proficient, cohesive teams.

Genuine respect is a key element in any mentoring program. Subordinates must be able to respect their leaders if they want to trust them as their guides and counselors. To obtain this trust and respect, leaders as mentors must:

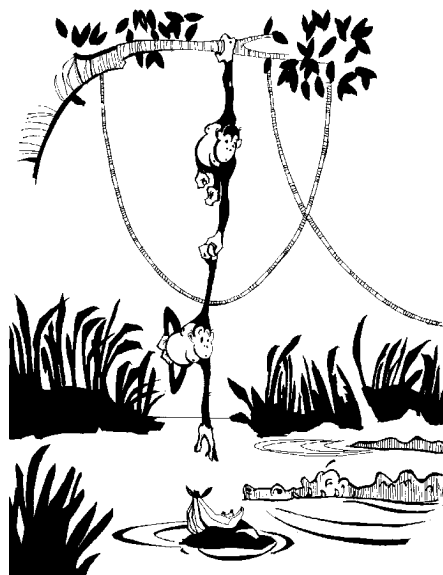
- ◆ Set a good example. Role modeling and setting examples for subordinates to follow are extremely important.
- ◆ Commit themselves to their subordinates and be fully committed to the complete development of those who are in need of some form of structured guidance in their lives.
- ◆ Possess the commitment of guardians and the duty of tutors.
- ◆ Have a personal stake in the positive and long-term development of those they are trying to help.
- ◆ Be sensitive to the feelings of their subordinates, yet be responsible for training them intensively.
- ◆ Develop the capacity to delegate authority in order to watch subordinates learn hard, valuable lessons through trial and error.
- ◆ Provide adequate and timely feedback to ensure the success of their subordinates' development process.



The Reward is Worth the Risk

MENTORING: WHAT'S IT ALL ABOUT?

Entering into a mentoring relationship can be rewarding and exciting. It even can be a little scary. There are responsibilities involved that require maturity, compassion, and sometimes tough decisions. In this new adventure you are about to begin as a mentor, use your head, trust your instincts, listen to your heart, and it will be the experience of a lifetime.



Helping Others

MENTORING FUNCTIONS

There are four mentoring functions that can guide you through this new adventure. They are: listening, coaching, educating, and role modeling.

Listening

The most important function of the mentor may be to listen. Many young people today do not have anyone at home who will take the time to listen to them. However, when there is someone with whom to “talk out” the situation, people are better able to sort out their difficulties and arrive at their own solutions.

Coaching

Coaches give praise for a job well done, encouragement when the going gets tough, and constructive criticism when they need to make changes. It is always easier to deal with the negatives when you know there are some positives.

Educating

Being a tutor is another responsibility of a mentor. Sometimes it may seem easier to do something for another person; however, that person will benefit more if he/she does it for themselves with only guidance from the mentor. One way to give a person (hereafter referred to as a **mentee**) control is to teach them the skills to take care of themselves.

Role Modeling

Mentors can help their mentees develop values, standards, and goals by allowing themselves to be seen as “real people” and by sharing personal beliefs and values. Mentors can also introduce their mentees to others whom they hold in high regard.

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MENTORS

The roles of mentors will vary with every situation. The following list is not all inclusive, but it gives you an idea of the different kinds of roles that mentors perform in typical mentoring programs.

A mentor is someone who:

- acts like an older brother or sister.
- generates respect and trust.
- helps mentees expect success.
- teaches by example and direction.
- admits to making mistakes, facing difficult tasks, and “not being perfect”.
- provides a positive role model.
- has something positive to contribute.
- participates in activities designed to motivate mentees.
- listens without judging.
- does fun things.
- tutors and helps to build good study habits.
- helps mentees develop a desire to attend/stay in school and improve school attendance.
- inspires others to set achievable goals.

Although your roles as a mentor may change with the situation, your responsibilities will remain constant throughout the mentoring program. The following list describes specifically what the program expects of you. We mentioned at the beginning of this lesson that being a mentor is not an easy task. As you read through these responsibilities, identify those areas where you must increase your self-awareness and/or develop the necessary attributes of self-esteem to be an effective mentor. Accomplishing these responsibilities

will require a high degree of self-identity and maturity.

1. Be aware of the impact that culture, **socioeconomic** status, experiences, etc., have on how the mentee sees and processes information. Become comfortable with the fact that the mentee may be different from you and may approach evaluating, perceiving, acting, and behaving differently than you do.
2. Be careful to respect the mentee's orientation and not to impose your values, assumptions, perceptions, and **biases** on the mentee. Be aware of your own attitudes, beliefs, and feelings and how these filters may bias your judgment.
3. Help your mentee to accomplish tasks, but be careful not to hold preconceived limitations about what that person can or cannot do. Recognize these limitations, but do not attempt to replace the mentee's personal efforts. Always remember that you are there to *assist*, not to *do* the task.
4. Acquire specific knowledge about the mentee with whom you work. If you find out that he/she has major challenges at home, school, and/or place of employment, be careful not to ask too many questions about any uncomfortable situations. If you encounter a situation that you do not feel comfortable handling, seek help or guidance from your instructors.
5. Teach the mentee to respond to verbal rewards. Do not give gifts as a means of positive recognition and do not become emotionally attached. If the relationship becomes personal to the degree you are not able to be objective, withdraw and refer the mentee to another mentor. If a mentee makes a habit of bringing you gifts, discourage that habit. Always read any

notes given to you by the mentee. Sometimes because of their learning style, mentees may not be able to vocalize their challenge but they are able to put it in writing. Never respond back in writing. If the notes are of a personal nature, discourage that habit. One or two positive words like "Congratulations!" or "Well done!" may be appropriate.

6. Help your mentee to make assessments about behavior, thoughts, and actions as that individual tries new activities. Help the mentee see the benefits of trying and taking risks with new behaviors. Give support when necessary.
7. Be clear, concise, direct, and consistent with feedback.
8. Help the mentee generate a variety of responses or alternatives to situations.
9. Do not make promises you cannot keep. Do not use the word promise to your mentee as you will be taking responsibility. Make "I" statements to your mentee of what you are willing to do. For example, "I will help you find out the easiest and most effective way for you to study."
10. Coordinate all planned activities with your instructors, the cooperating agency, other mentors, and the mentee.
11. Prepare for and complete the tasks you agreed to do.
12. Follow the rules of your battalion and school while working with the mentee.
13. Make arrangements to contact the mentee's guardians, parents, teachers, etc., for permission to take that person on special activities.

14. If you cannot perform a task that you agreed to do at the prescribed time, reschedule it for another time.
15. Do not break confidentiality by sharing the mentee's concerns with others. However, confidentiality should always be overridden if the situation calls for it. A competent mentor maintains confidences and does not discuss personal interviews with other cadets or people. If the challenge is beyond your scope, contact a qualified person. It is critical that you use concrete procedures in serious cases. If a life-threatening situation arises:
 - ◆ Inform your mentee that you will notify a competent adviser because you *care*.
 - ◆ Encourage the mentee to go with you to the adviser to explain the situation. If the mentee refuses, insist that he or she go. Explain that you are not only concerned, but that the seriousness of the situation requires the mentee to seek counsel. If the mentee still refuses, clearly state, "I will seek advice alone from (state the name of the adviser)."

KNOWING YOURSELF, YOUR STRENGTHS AND YOUR ABILITIES

To be an effective mentor, you must first be able to see yourself in that role. You should have an appreciation for the kind of mentor you would like to be and the qualities that you believe are important. Essentially, you must:

- ◆ Be aware of your strengths and abilities.
- ◆ Know the impact that you have on others.
- ◆ Know what qualities you need to develop to become a better mentor.

- ◆ Be able to see and learn about yourself through the mirror of others.
- ◆ Understand individual and group values and norms.
- ◆ Enhance your leadership development, competence, self-awareness, and self-esteem.

To a large extent, your attitude affects your personality. An individual's personality is the unique mixture of physical and mental traits found in a person. Before becoming a mentor, you should identify how you perceive yourself. The key to self-evaluation (or self-identity) is honesty. Know whether your strengths lie in handling physical abilities, mental activities, or a combination of both.

POSITIVE SELF-ESTEEM BRINGS ABOUT POSITIVE IMAGES AND ACTIONS

Your attitudes can also affect how you perceive things and make decisions. By possessing a positive attitude, your outlook on life would most likely favor:

- ◆ Creative activities rather than boredom;
- ◆ Joy over sadness; hope over futility; and
- ◆ Bouncing back over giving up.

All people have different attitudes, perceptions, and experiences. Therefore, compromise is sometimes a must and communication is extremely important when working together as a team toward a common goal. Although you may initially have a different opinion than those around you, when you recognize that other differences exist, you will begin to see some of those similarities as well.

USING EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Participating in a mentoring relationship is not the time to misunderstand the use of a word, a gesture, or an emotion. Mentors must thoroughly understand the importance of using effective communication. The proper application of listening, non-verbal communication (such as body language), and verbal communication skills — as well as “I” messages — are critical to a successful mentoring program.

Any relationship must begin with communication in one form or another. The quality of that relationship often depends on the quality of the communication. Much of the communication we use in our daily lives involves some negative habits. Imagine how you feel when someone nags, reminds, criticizes, threatens, lectures, advises, or ridicules you. Many times the person doing this to you is not aware of the feelings these actions cause. Whether we are aware of these habits or not, they promise to lessen the quality of our relationships.

Study the following communication jam-mers and identify the ones you use most often. Then, try to determine why they are not helpful in maintaining satisfying relationships.

1. Ordering, commanding. The phrases “*You must*,” “*You will*,” or “*You have to*” are a great way to create a power struggle, implying that you are superior. They are usually successful in producing anger and resistance. A favorite counter to these phrases is “*Make me*.” Therefore, you will find it is more helpful to ask for cooperation with your mentee and to give choices, such as: “*I would appreciate . . .*,” “*It’s your choice; you can either . . . or . . .*,” or “*Would you rather . . . or . . .?*”
2. Warning, threatening. The phrases “*If you do that, you’ll be sorry*” or “*You’d better not do that if you know what’s good for you*” invite testing, threats, and hostility. Do not use them unless you want to fight with your mentee. The consequences and action methods are more effective. Simply state what you plan to do and then do it. There are no further reminders: just act — don’t talk.
3. Moralizing, preaching. When you use the “*shoulds*,” “*oughts*,” or “*musts*,” the mentee may hear only the control part and may resist without considering the reasons or consequences. It is much more effective to listen and to problem-solve; for example, “*Have you thought what might happen . . .?*” or “*What do you think might happen if . . .?*”
4. Proposing alternatives, giving solutions. Use “*Now, if it were up to me . . .*” or “*What you should do is . . .*” when you propose alternatives and help the mentee to find solutions — both important elements of mentoring responsibilities. However, in circumstances similar to counseling someone using the directive approach there are several mentee behaviors for which you should be on the lookout. They are:
 - o Often, the person resists your proposals.
 - o You do not want the mentee dependent on you. Instead, you want the individual to think for herself/himself.
 - o If the mentee takes your suggestion and it does not work, that person may hold you responsible.
5. Lecturing, giving logical arguments. When trying to prove your point with the facts, such as “*You’re wrong here*” or “*Yes, but . . .*,” people are often well aware of the facts and resent being told

them again and again. Trying to persuade with facts is usually not effective. Instead, helping your mentee to explore the goals, alternatives, and consequences of a proposed action gives you much more influence in guiding the person.

6. The put-downs — judging, ridiculing, blaming, name-calling, sarcasm, shaming. Some people use phrases like *“How stupid,” “You’re just lazy,” “It’s all your fault,” “That’s an immature point of view,”* or *“Okay, big shot”* to motivate others by making them feel inadequate or inferior. However, these phrases normally succeed only in putting people on the defensive as they try to protect their self-image. The common responses are to return criticism, seal off feeling, or shut down communications and cooperation. It is important to separate the behavior you disagree with from the person’s character and worth. It is harder to be specific about what you want without dragging the person’s dignity through the mud, but far more effective.
7. Playing psychologist, analyzing and diagnosing. When using the phrases *“The problem with you is . . .”* or *“You’re just jealous,”* you can embarrass, frustrate, or threaten people because you are indicating that you know what their motives are or have figured them out. This technique is another way to shut off communications and guarantee the person will not share difficult matters with you. Besides, if your interpretation is wrong, the person will most likely become angry.
8. Consoling. *“It’s not really that bad,” “You’ll feel better in the morning,”* or *“Don’t worry, it’ll all work out”* are phrases a consoling person uses when trying to keep from getting involved. These

phrases treat the other person’s feelings lightly. Helping the person to explore alternatives and listening are more helpful. Sometimes, people are not looking to solve a problem; instead, they are complaining just to let off steam. Then, when you offer a solution, you could complicate the issue, anger them, or make the situation larger than what it really is.

LISTENING SKILLS

As mentors, you must understand the value of listening. Listen carefully for “feeling words” such as sad, happy, embarrassed, frustrated, alone, hurt, angry, bored, jealous, confused, etc. Realize that everyone has feelings and they need to have ways in which to express them.

To ensure proper and effective communications with your mentee, you must first be able to identify what and how you feel while listening to your mentee. Then, learn what the mentee actually felt. These feelings may be the same or they may be different. For example, the mentee may be feeling depression, but you may feel frustration when hearing these words because you do not know how to help.

Additionally, understand some of the **stereotypes** related to listening. It is only natural for people to form different opinions about something. Oftentimes, these individual opinions will disagree with the opinions of others. It is your job as a mentor to know how feelings, stereotypes, and opinions reflect upon your mentee’s values, attitudes, and behavior. Be able to identify these characteristics in a mentoring relationship and determine how you can use them to become a better mentor.

NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Know the importance of non-verbal communications and the impact it has on others. Observe how your mentee listens; then, uses body language and eye contact. Remember, how your mentee says something is frequently more important than what he or she says. The behavior that this person displays sometimes expresses more meaning than words.

“I” MESSAGES

“I” messages are statements, beginning with “I,” that tell how you feel about a certain situation. They are the most appropriate way to express your feelings whenever a conflict arises. They show concern in a calm and respectful way. Plus, they focus the communication on your feelings and expectations rather than those of the other person — your mentee.

Whenever we focus attention on the other person’s feelings and expectations, whether by accident or on purpose, the communication often takes on a blaming and accusatory tone. “I” messages express what the conflict is to the other person and how this conflict affects you.

Think about the last time you were in an argument. Did you use “I” messages? It sounds easy, but it takes a lot of practice. A typical “I” message has three parts, shown in parentheses, which can come in any order.

“I feel (*state feeling*) when you (*describe specific behavior*) because (*state how it affects you*).”

To reinforce your understanding of “I” messages, review both examples below. The “you” messages are first, followed by the appropriate “I” messages.

⇒ *Example #1:*

“You promised you’d never tell anyone. I knew I shouldn’t have told you. You can’t ever keep a secret.”

“I feel hurt when you tell something I told you in secret because I didn’t want anyone else to know.”

⇒ *Example #2:*

“You’re never organized or dependable. You can’t be counted on.”

“I get really upset whenever you back out on something, especially at the last minute because it leaves me stuck holding the bag.”

EXPLORING ALTERNATIVES

What would you do if your mentee came to you with a difficult situation and wanted you to help? In most situations, your job is not to find the solution for the mentee, but to help that person develop solutions to handle the issue. When you assist someone in exploring alternatives, it is always helpful to follow a pattern similar to the one below. The key words in this exploring alternatives model are: brainstorm, assist, choose, commitment, and follow-up.

- ◇ What is the difficulty and what are the alternatives? The mentor and mentee should *brainstorm* as many ways of handling the situation as possible.
- ◇ What are the consequences of each alternative? The mentor should *assist* the mentee in evaluating the pros and cons for each alternative.
- ◇ What is the best alternative? The mentee must *choose* what he/she thinks is best.

- ◇ When is the best time to put the plan into action? The mentee, under close coordination and supervision of the mentor, must make a *commitment* to begin using the best alternative as soon as the situation permits.
- ◇ Is there evaluation? Yes! The mentor must set a time to *follow-up* and evaluate how the mentee is accomplishing the plan.

When helping your mentee to choose a solution, especially if that person seems stuck, you can offer suggestions as other possible alternatives. However, do not put the person down for not accepting your ideas and do not take his or her responsibility away to solve the issue. After all, if your efforts fail, that person may hold you responsible or may not do as you suggested. Keep the mentoring relationship a learning process to help with future problems, as needed.

Remember:

*Developing positive mentoring relationships is not about **WINNING**, but **SOLVING** the conflict.*

DEVELOPING AN ACTION PLAN

An effective action plan can make a difference, not only for the mentee, but for the mentor, the school, and the community. It can reach out and help troubled youths, especially in today's society. It should recognize the issues, strengths, and challenges that exist within a community and identify ways to meet them. Plus, it should clearly indicate what the community has to offer, the challenges that mentoring teams must overcome to make their programs work, and the strengths that these teams can bring to the overall mentoring effort.

When assessing your community, look at its demographics (age, gender, **ethnicity**, etc., of the population), geography, environment, and/or other significant characteristics. Then, determine from these characteristics your community's issues, strengths, and challenges.

The action plan should also address the impact that ideal characteristics and values of family involvement can have on a mentoring program. Examples of these ideal characteristics of the family include:

- ◆ Schools and families work cooperatively in support of the student's education.
- ◆ Program and school administrators and staff generally have a positive and assertive attitude toward parent involvement.
- ◆ Parents are a positive resource. They participate in numerous activities, are visible in a variety of functions, and have an acute mutual support network.
- ◆ Parent-sponsored leadership programs exist that create new leaders for the community.

A HUNDRED YEARS

A hundred years from now
it will not matter
what my bank account was,
the sort of house I lived in
or how spotless it was,
or the kind of car I drove.
But, the world may be
different because I was
important in the life of
another.

SAMPLE ACTION PLAN FORMAT

An action plan should emphasize team tasks and responsibilities. It should identify

who has overall responsibility, who prepares the tasks, and community/family involvement. A thoroughly prepared plan adds credibility to the effort and ensures a smooth and efficient running program. The parts of an action plan are:

- ◇ Mentor recruitment and selection
- ◇ Mentee selection
- ◇ Mentor training (what type and how much?)
- ◇ Matching mentors with mentees
- ◇ Maintaining monthly activity calendars
- ◇ Coordination between schools and agencies
- ◇ Planned activities/projects
- ◇ Supervision of mentors/mentees
- ◇ Family involvement
- ◇ Community involvement/resources (such as financial, support services, transportation, public relations, etc.)

A MENTOR'S JOURNAL

Establishing a journal is an excellent method for keeping track of your mentor visits. Your journal entries will help you to recall the topics you discussed and the activities you conducted with your mentee on previous occasions, how you prepared for those activities, and your mood (how you felt) before and after the visit.

Remember, information recorded in your journal must be kept confidential. Store it in a locked place; do not leave it in your locker or on a desk where others can read it. Your instructors will help you to find a secure place, if necessary. Additionally, do not record information in your journal that is of a life-threatening or serious matter to the mentee; instead, discuss that content with a competent adviser.

The standard entries for a mentor's journal include:

- ◇ Contact time and date

- ◇ Your name and the mentee's name
- ◇ Location of contact
- ◇ Type of activity performed with mentee
- ◇ An explanation of what you did to prepare for this activity
- ◇ An explanation of what you wanted to gain from this activity
- ◇ Explanations of how you felt before the beginning of this activity . . . and after it
- ◇ A rating scale that indicates the tone (depressed, moderate, or excited) of the visit and measures three areas: the mentoring relationship, the mentor's mood, and the mentee's mood
- ◇ A list of possible discussion topics:

Personal issues

Substance abuse

School issues

Friendships

Emotional issues

Actual/other concerns

Family issues

Legal concerns

Tutoring

Hobbies

Relationships

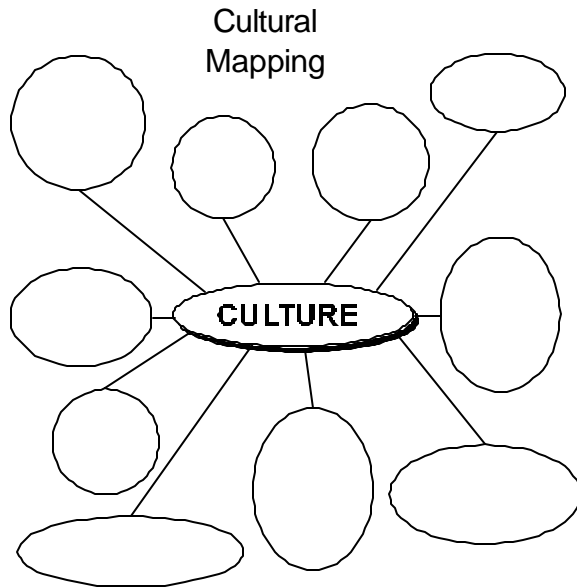
COMPREHENDING CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Before anyone can begin to understand other people, he or she must first understand themselves. Mainly, that we are all part of a culture of some sort, we all belong to a race, and we all have some kind of ethnic heritage. What is the first thought that comes to your mind when you hear the word . . . culture? How about race? Racism? Do you belong to a culture? What kind is it and does it affect your everyday life? Presented below are definitions for these terms to help you answer these questions.

CULTURE

A society's culture is the learned, shared, and transmitted social activities of a group — the part of the environment that satisfies all the basic needs for survival and adaptation to the environment. In short, it is

that part of our lives that we learn, which causes us to act and react in certain ways (such as the way we dress, greet people, eat, and get angry, among other factors).



Cultural Characteristics

Understanding the different types and diversities of cultures (often referred to as **multi-cultural diversity**) and the characteristics within those cultures can give you a better perspective of how those factors can impact a mentoring program, how you can overcome cultural barriers, and what activities in your program should address cultural differences. Presented below are six broad cultural characteristics with examples of each.

- **Language/Communications.** Preferred manner of speaking, origins of the language, names of people and places, gestures or postures, current **colloquialisms**, and games and other forms of entertainment.
- **Humanistic.** Forms of kindness and humor; concepts of human capability and potential, justice, fairness, competition, and cooperation; unselfishness; and leadership.

- **Historical.** Persons from political, literary, artistic, and scholarly arenas; events recorded and remembered; ancestral contributions; and origins of surnames.
- **Deep.** Family ties and relationships, friendships, pride and self-respect, and milestones in personal life (birthdays, funerals, etc.).
- **Formal.** Literary landmarks, museums, music, art, dance, holidays, and parades.
- **Situational.** Inter- and intra-group relations, well-known contemporary personalities, social awareness and recognition, physical similarities and differences, and diet.

RACE

Race is a concept used by some scientists to divide human beings into categories based on physical characteristics of size and shape of the head, eyes, ears, lips, and nose, and the color of the skin and eyes.

DID YOU KNOW?

Following the eighteenth century trend among European scientists to classify all living things, a scientist named J. F. Blumenback first categorized human racial types as American Indian, Caucasoid, Malayan, Mongoloid, and Negroid. Today, American Indians and Malaysians are generally considered part of the Mongoloid race.

RACISM

Racism is the belief that one's own race is superior to another based on:

- The erroneous assumption that physical attributes of a racial group determine their

social behavior as well as their psychological and intellectual characteristics.

- The wrong ideal that all people of one race act and react the same way, in an inferior way, and that people of a superior race should treat them poorly.

ETHNICITY

Ethnicity is not the same as race or culture, but may contain parts of each. We define an ethnic group as a group of people within a larger society that distinguishes or sets itself apart from others based on race and cultural characteristics such as religion, language, and traditions.

Have you ever felt different than other people? Have other people treated you differently? Do you wish sometimes that you could be invisible? Have people laughed at you for something you cannot control? And you laughed back, but inside it really hurt? Do people make you feel dumb? Have you been in a situation when you were afraid because you felt you did not belong? Do you wish that people would just give you a chance?

What came to mind when you read the these questions? Did you think of prejudices?

PREJUDICES

Prejudice goes far beyond color and gender. It is about religion, money, and many other things as diverse as the part of the country from where someone comes. Have you ever been in another part of the country and someone commented about the way you spoke? Did they make fun of you? If so, that is prejudice. Prejudice is something we all learn. However, many times we are not aware of its existence in our lives or the fact that we may be prejudiced ourselves in one way or another.

As mentors, you must guard against treating people differently than others or making prejudiced remarks. In order to be effective in a culturally diverse community, you will need the following basic skills and attitudes:

- A positive attitude.
- An ability to communicate effectively (written, verbal, and non-verbal).
- An ability to challenge and stimulate others, especially children, to learn.
- An ability to think critically and creatively.
- A sensitivity to individual differences.
- A willingness to build and strengthen bridges between your home, school, and community.
- A willingness to integrate a **multicultural** perspective into your mentoring relationships.
- A self-awareness (of attitudes on multiculturalism; and of strengths and weaknesses in working with people from different cultural backgrounds).

CONTEMPORARY ISSUES IN MENTORING

This section gives you an appreciation of the different matters that you will most likely encounter during your mentoring relationships and how to cope with them. They include how to help mentees get a handle on stress, cope with the loss of a family member or friend, or better understand the issues of troubled families. These topics are not easily talked about, but they are vitally important to your job. They are becoming increasingly common in the life histories of mentees.

Read the following issues carefully; then, openly discuss any questions or comments you may have on them.

HANDLING STRESS

Death of a family member or friend, parents getting divorced or separated, relocation resulting in new schools and friends, the birth of a sibling, a change in the amount of television viewing are all forms of stress, called stressors. Stress can be a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tensions and may be a factor in causing certain diseases. Within any given year, a person can experience enough events (stressors) in their lives to have a better than average chance of showing symptoms of stress or even causing a serious change in their health and/or behavior.

Mentors must be aware of these stressors, and be able to assess the effect they have on their mentee as well as how he/she is handling the stress. One of your cadet activities is learning how to estimate stress. This activity offers a list of stressors and a point scale for adding up the potential stress during a year. Mentors should use this exercise as a point of reference in their mentee's lives and not to diagnose problems. This checklist is intended primarily to assist you in evaluating a mentee's potential level of stress.

Resolving stress can take a long time — it is a continuous process. As soon as a person overcomes one or more of the stressors, others may become a factor. If your mentee appears to have a stress-related difficulty, help that person to start getting a handle on it. Review the following 11 stress handlers with the individual to determine which ones they have tried, are doing now, and are willing to try. Once you can get your mentee's stress under control, you can begin to effectively deal with other issues affecting that person.

1. Work off stress. If you are angry or upset, try to blow off steam physically by activities such as running or sports. Even taking a walk can help.
2. Talk out your worries. It helps to share worries with someone you trust and respect. This may be a friend, family member, teacher, or counselor. Sometimes another person can point out a new side to a difficult situation and thus, a new solution.
3. Learn to accept what one cannot change. If the matter is beyond your control at this time, try your best to accept it until you can change it. It beats spinning your wheels and getting nowhere.
4. Get plenty of sleep and rest. Lack of sleep can lessen your ability to deal with stress by making you more irritable.
5. Balance work and recreation. All work and no play can make for a nervous wreck. Set time for recreation and relax your mind.
6. Do something for others. Sometimes when you are depressed, you concentrate too much on yourself and your situation. When this happens, it is often wise to do something for someone else and get your mind off yourself. There is an extra bonus in this technique: it helps you to make friends.
7. Take one thing at a time. Many times we set ourselves up for failure by trying to do too much. It is defeating to tackle all your tasks at once. Instead, set some tasks aside and work on the most urgent ones first.
8. Give in once in a while. If you find the source of your stress is other people, try giving in instead of fighting and insisting you are always right. You may find that others will begin to give in, too.

9. Know your abilities and limitations. This is not easy. It takes a lot of self-study. Many times you can cause stress by asking yourself to do something you are not able to do. Before agreeing to do something that you do not have to do, ask yourself if it is within your ability to accomplish.
 - ◇ Encourage expressions of grief through talking, writing, etc.
 - ◇ Acknowledge that grief hurts.
 - ◇ Realize that grief causes difficulty in concentrating.
10. Organize yourself and your time. Learn ways to help yourself keep up with what you have to do. Plan how you will accomplish the necessary work. Organization can help you avoid wasting time and energy.
 - ◇ Understand that other circumstances (such as a change in school, friends, etc.) often accompany the initial loss.
 - ◇ Become part of a caring team.
11. Avoid being a perfectionist. No one person can be perfect at everything. Do your best first, but do not be afraid of making a mistake. Everyone makes mistakes, and many times we learn by our mistakes.
 - ◇ Know that grief lasts longer than anyone expects.
 - ◇ Continue to be available.

COPING WITH LOSS

As we just mentioned in the preceding section, the death of a family member is a form of stress. In fact, on the point scale for determining potential stress, the death of a parent is the most stressful event and the death of a close family member is the fifth most stressful.

Helping someone to cope with the loss of a loved one is an extremely difficult task. Emotions are very high, not just for the mentee, but for the entire family. Because of the tenseness of this situation, your actions must be caring, supportive, and sincere. In these situations you should:

- ◇ Listen.
- ◇ Be available.
- ◇ Face your own feelings of loss and grief and share them if you like.

TROUBLED FAMILIES: KNOWING THE ISSUES

By being aware of the following issues, mentors can help to provide safe environments for mentees. The intention of this section is not to teach mentors how to do family therapy — *that is not the role of the mentor*. However, mentors do play a crucial role in helping to:

- Identify these situations.
- Refer mentees to appropriate professionals.
- Be supportive.

There are three general categories of serious family **dysfunctions**: addictions, abuse, and neglect. Mentors must realize that these situations occur in every neighborhood. People affected are those with money or no money; they live in the city, country, or suburb; they are all races and ethnic groups; they are of every religion or no religion; and they are the old, the middle-aged, or the young.

Addictions

Alcohol and drug abuse can originate and affect an entire family. Additionally, other family or community members with a serious substance abuse problem can also influence the whole family, including the mentee and mentor. When just one parent has an addiction, children often develop a dysfunctional reaction and/or relationship to that parent. As mentors, be alert to:

- o “People pleasing” behaviors (such as the mentee making excuses for the parents) with the addiction, doing excess work around the house, and/or feeling responsible for the parent’s addiction)
- o Anger
- o Depression
- o Lack of trust
- o Running away
- o Signs of abuse
- o Injuries

Abuse

There are three kinds of abuse: physical, sexual, and mental/emotional. Each state has its own legal definition of physical and sexual abuse. Know what your state’s statutes and reporting requirements are before performing any mentoring activities. The following paragraphs offer a definition for and some of the more common signs and symptoms associated with specific kinds of abuse. Identifying abusive situations is a difficult task for trained professionals; however, as mentors, you may be in a unique position to notice when something looks wrong.

Physical Abuse

Definition. For this instruction, we will define physical abuse as any form of contact ranging from severe pinching, hard slaps, to hitting with a closed fist or some other object. Burning, mutilation of any part of the body, or an internal injury may also be forms of physical abuse.

Signs and Symptoms. Physical abuse is perhaps the easiest to detect. Its victims normally show signs of serious injuries or of long-lasting marks, bruises, or scars. Additionally, physically abused children are often unusually fearful of or nervous around the abusive parent. You may suspect physical abuse if the mentee has frequent unexplained injuries or questionable explanations for those injuries.

Sexual Abuse

Definition. Sexual abuse normally includes incest (abuse within a family) or non-family sexual abuse. Incest can be one of the most difficult challenges to deal with and to overcome. It oftentimes is “the biggest family secret.” Incest can range from inappropriate touching and kissing to intercourse. While touching and kissing can be good and an appropriate expression of love, children tend to know intuitively the difference between good touching and bad touching.

Signs and Symptoms. Sexually abused victims often have an unusual and extreme dislike for being touched. On the other hand, some sexually-abused children try to please adults by being physically affectionate in ways which may have sexual overtones. If you believe that your mentee shows one of the following signs, it can be an indication of sexual abuse. Trust your intuitions and talk to your instructors about your beliefs.

- The way the mentee displays affection is inappropriate for his/her age.
- The mentee shows high levels of anxiety or fear if left alone with a particular family member.

Mental/Emotional Abuse

Definition. Mental/emotional abuse includes withholding love, making love conditional, communicating severe and constant “put-downs,” or shaming someone with the intention of making that person feel bad or worthless. It is probably the hardest to detect, and it has long-lasting impacts on the self-esteem of the mentee.

Signs and Symptoms. Emotionally abused children tend to put themselves down or criticize themselves a lot.

What Should You Do When Dealing with Matters of Troubled Families?

If your mentee discloses abuse to you, it will most likely be a shocking and difficult experience to handle. However, you have the responsibility to commit yourself and your efforts to supporting the individual and to his/her needs. Listen. Be honest. Do not make assumptions on how that person should feel. Emphasize that he/she is not alone. Oftentimes, the most helpful thing to do is just to be someone the mentee can count on and/or be with — without feeling pressured. Finally, do not normalize or downplay the abusive situation.

If you know of or suspect abuse, the first thing to do is to contact your instructors. The following list identifies other signs and symptoms to watch for, regardless of the type of abuse. Note, however, that non-abused individuals may also exhibit some of these

signs or symptoms from time to time in order to gain attention, because of low self-esteem, etc.

⇒ Persistent and unexpected depression or withdrawal.

⇒ Excessive anger or emotions.

⇒ Self-mutilation.

⇒ Constant running away.

⇒ Inability to trust.

⇒ Difficulty in developing healthy, long-term relationships.

⇒ Suicidal/homicidal thoughts.

By reporting potentially harmful or abusive activities to your instructor, you are not breaching your mentee’s trust. Your willingness to take a risk to discuss your observations comes from your concern for the mentee and is always the right thing to do. Your instructor will determine what additional steps are necessary and appropriate for the situation.

Commitment is easy during the good times; *it is during the rough times when mentors are truly tested.*

Sometimes, the best thing a mentor can do for a mentee is *just be there.*

CONCLUSION

As a mentor, there are many difficult situations that you may encounter in mentoring relationships: prejudices, handling stress, coping with loss, and understanding the issues of troubled families. These topics are vitally important to your job because they are becoming increasingly commonplace in today’s

lifestyles. If you have questions regarding any of these issues, discuss them with your instructors.

Summarized below are the qualities of a successful mentor. Follow these qualities carefully, display maturity, show compassion, use your head, trust your instincts, listen to your heart, and you will make your mentoring opportunity the experience of a lifetime.

- ◇ Know yourself, your strengths, and your weaknesses.
- ◇ Know your job — be flexible and open-minded.
- ◇ Know and use communication skills effectively, such as the:
 - o Ability to listen and accept different points of view.
 - o Ability to empathize with another person's struggle.

- ◇ Apply effective leadership skills such as decision-making, problem-solving, and goal-setting; possess the ability to see solutions, opportunities and barriers.
- ◇ Understand how cultural diversity can affect a mentoring relationship.
- ◇ Be personally committed to working with people — be available and supportive.
- ◇ Show respect for individuals — display honesty, patience, trust, and a warm and caring attitude.

* * *

There are many important things to accomplish in life — helping someone to help themselves is one of them. Remember, it sometimes takes a while to get something done right. What is important, however, is to keep trying — *never give up*.